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ABSTRACT

Nonverbal phenomena associated with communication can take a variety of forms: kinesic behavior, physical characteristics, touching behavior, paralanguage, proxemics, artifacts, or environmental factors. To be regarded as communication, nonverbal behavior should be intentional and goal-directed, but it need not involve a conscious choice by the speaker. Recently, many scholars have emphasized both the importance of nonverbal behavior in the communicative event and the complexity of communicative signals, both verbal and nonverbal. Nonverbal signals are multifunctional, augment verbal signals in unique ways, and are intricately combined with verbal signals in communication. In impromptu speech, both verbal and nonverbal choices made by the speaker are spontaneous, not planned as they might be, to some extent, in non-impromptu speech. In general, the importance of the nonverbal channel depends on the function of the discourse, which also determines the communication style. More informative discourse depends more on the linguistic code, while emphasis on the social and expressive function of the communication means greater dependence on the nonverbal. (MSE)

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NON-VERBAL ASPECTS OF IMPROMPTU SPEECH

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Non-verbal aspects of impromptu speech

1. The definition of 'non-verbal'

Non-verbal communication is one of the new fields of interest. In recent years it has found its way also into linguistic studies of spoken language. Research into non-verbal phenomena has given birth to a bulk of studies which emphasize the complexity of communication and the role of the non-verbal aspects of human interaction (cf. Key 1977, 1980; Boileau 1981; Obudho 1979).

For some reason, many discussions of non-verbal aspects of communication begin with an elucidation of the author's background. This often sounds like an excuse to readers whose background is not in linguistics, social psychology or, perhaps, psychiatry. This kind of cautiousness reflects the fact that, after ten years of progress since the classical works of Mehrabian, Argyle, Birdwhistell, Knapp and others, non-verbal communication is still regarded as a vague and indistinct concept. The existence of numerous non-scientific, popular books on 'body language' may also have given birth to healthy criticism of the entire field of non-verbal communication. In one of his articles Robert M. Soucie lists some popular misconceptions about non-verbal communication (Soucie 1979). Although Soucie's discussion is concerned with the layman's general misconceptions, much of what he says could be said of linguists' attitudes too. The common notions discussed by Soucie are: (1) non-verbal communication covers only a minor part of interpersonal communication and, for intelligent people, at least, language is the primary and the only major communicative medium during interaction; (2) everyone acquires automatically a sufficient degree of non-verbal communication skills in daily encounters; because of this natural process, the teaching of non-verbal communication would be a waste of time, and (3) an average person is little aware of his non-verbal behaviour, which is good, as a matter of fact, since too much awareness of non-verbal communication would be a threat to one's

'information preserve'. Awareness of non-verbal communication would inevitably produce a society of liars; therefore the study of non-verbal communication cannot be anything but dangerous meddling.

Another widespread misconception is the idea that non-verbal communication forms are 'primitive precursors' to verbal language and that non-verbal communication is just a less explicit variant of the verbal mode. Wiener *et al.* (1980:278ff.) point out, however, that verbal forms are as much a substitute for non-verbal forms as the reverse, and that translations from the non-verbal mode into language often lose as much of their content as idioms or metaphors lose in translation from one language into another.

What is meant by non-verbal communication, what is it used for, and what is its relation to the verbal part of discourse in general, especially with regard to the impromptu aspects of speaking? Linguistic, or grammatical, and communicative approaches differ in their attitudes towards the non-verbal variables. For a linguist, non-verbal features are normally co-occurring phenomena, which are of interest only if they somehow modify the verbal message or explain the flow of the linguistic text. Very few linguists seem to share the view which Mary Ritchie Key (1980:vii) presents as a starting point to the analysis of the relationship of verbal and non-verbal communication. According to Key, "When human beings interact, language, in a linguistic sense, may or may not occur, but extralinguistic correlates *always* occur . . . the main channel of communication between human beings very often is not language."

As Mark L. Knapp (1978) points out, the term *non-verbal* is subject to a variety of interpretations – in this resembling the term *communication*. Knapp classifies non-verbal phenomena into five main categories: (1) *kinesic behaviour*, ie. body motions, which in turn can be emblems (eg. the victory sign of Churchill), illustrators (non-verbal acts which are tied to speech and illustrate what is being said verbally), affect displays (primarily facial configurations), regulators (which tell the speaker to continue, repeat, elaborate, hurry up, give the interlocutor a chance to talk, etc.), and adaptors (such as wiping the corner of the eye, scratching the hair, and other functions which are not intended but which may be triggered by verbal behaviour in a given situation); (2) permanent *physical characteristics*, such as general attractiveness, odours, skin colour, etc.; (3) *touching behaviour*, ie. actual physical contacts; (4) *paralanguage*, which includes vocal qualities such as pitch range, rhythm,

tempo, articulation control, and other non-phonological features of the speaking voice, as well as various vocalizations like laughing, crying, marked inhaling, clearing the throat, hesitations, or such things as "uh", "um"; (5) *proxemics* or the use and perception of social and personal space, and the use of personal territory; (6) *artifacts* such as perfumes, clothes, eyeglasses, pipe, hairpieces, and so on; and finally (7) *environmental factors*, which include the furniture, interior decorating, noises or music and the like within which the interaction occurs (see Knapp 1978: 12ff.).

2. Defining communication

The list of non-verbal phenomena in section 1 easily gives the impression that non-verbal communication is a label for a dustbin where everything but the linguistic form of the message has been thrown. Such an impression may be, in part, due to the vagueness of the concept of communication. Barker and Collins, for instance (quotation from Harper *et al.* 1978), argue that "non-verbal communication is much broader than non-verbal behaviour. A room devoid of behaving, living things communicates atmosphere and function. Static clothing communicates the personality of the wearer." Such a view of communication clearly leads to a chaos of messages sent by pencils, carpets, wallpapers, trees and the stars! For communication proper there must be something which is part of active behaviour, which again is part of a shared code. Harper, Wiens and Matarazzo (1978) arbitrarily limit their consideration of non-verbal phenomena to those that are most important in the structuring and occurrence of interpersonal communication and the moment-to-moment regulation of interaction. A more accurate definition of non-verbal communication seems necessary. My own suggestion is that, to be regarded as communication, non-verbal behaviour should be intentional and goal-directed, but it need not necessarily involve a conscious choice by the speaker. Both the sending and the interpreting of non-verbal signals very often takes place at a subconscious level or below the focus of conscious attention. Much of what is sometimes taken to be non-verbal communication is not *communication*, because the behaviour in question was not chosen intentionally in order to affect the interlocutor or is not under volitional control at all. Pupil dilation, for instance, which may signal sexual arousal or anxiety to the observer, is

not communication, because the phenomenon is an automatic physiological response which cannot be volitionally controlled.

Yet the borderline between 'passive', uncontrolled, non-volitional symptoms of emotional and physiological states and intentional, consciously controlled and addressed non-verbal communications is vague. According to a very strict definition of communication, a smile, for instance, is a piece of communication only if it is intentionally pretended! This does not mean that unintentional behaviour or static environmental and other factors have no role in the development of the interactional situation. The more sensitive the listener or the other interactants are non-verbally and socially, the more cues they are able to exploit concerning the interlocutor's emotional state, attitudes, standard of living, state of health, social position, and so on. But this is not information sent to him by his interactant; it is based on the use of his own internal knowledge. Discovery of a cigarette stump, a smudge of lipstick on a collar, or books on a shelf may suggest important pieces of information to the observer, ie. these findings may be of high informative value to him, but they are not communication.

Gestures, mime, and body movements and positions are all important elements in the regulation of human interaction, in the exchange of affective information, and also in the processes of encoding and decoding attitudes towards the interlocutor or towards the topic under discussion. Textbooks of speech communication frequently cite the percentages from an early work by Mehrabian (1968:53) which indicated that up to 93 per cent of people's first impression of the interlocutor is based on non-verbal cues. Some of the writers misinterpret, however, the data given by Mehrabian and state that 93 per cent of all human communication is non-verbal. This is of course absurd.

3. Non-verbal features in the communicative event

What is the interrelationship between non-verbal studies and linguistics? Recently, many scholars have emphasized the importance of the non-verbal channel in human communication. For John Lamendella, for instance, language and NVC are alternative output channels based on neural processes on the same level: ". . . the so-called extralinguistic and non-verbal aspects of

communication aren't mere window dressing that accompany sentences optionally but a fundamental ingredient of the process by which people decode and encode messages. Many propositional and symbolic components of communicative interactions are not expressed by linguistic means but rather by way of conventionalized manual gestures, body movements, facial expressions, and prosodic elements beyond phonology" (Lamendella 1977: 158).

The complexity of communicative signals has also been frequently emphasized in the literature. The combination of verbal and non-verbal elements in the messages has been found to be so intricate that the understanding of verbal communication is not possible without reference to the non-verbal components. For linguistic analysis this is an important question. Should non-verbal structures and rules be incorporated in the study of language and in the rules of grammar? Or should word and non-word behaviours be studied as separate entities? Or is it indeed impossible to analyze and describe language without reference to the non-verbal system? The opposite formulation of the question is, of course, whether non-verbal behaviours should and could be studied in isolation separated from the linguistic structures and hierarchies (cf. Lehtonen 1980). The answer to these questions depends on what we want to know about language and communication. If the entity to be analyzed is language or the structure of grammar, it should be seen as an autonomous signifying system which must be described and analyzed without reference to any 'concomitant' systems; if the object of the analysis is not language but the system of human communication, any attempt to implement the analysis without the non-verbal parameters will certainly fail. It goes without saying that the description of the development of an interactive situation is not possible without the observation of the non-linguistic messages exchanged between the participants.

Figure 1 illustrates a model of the progression of communicative events developed by the Jyväskylä research group (cf. Sajavaara 1980). The dotted cube on the right stands for the entire communicative event, or the overt audible and visible behaviour of the speaker. This behaviour consists of both intentional and addressed behaviours, verbal and non-verbal, and of the non-intentional and non-addressed and subconsciously controlled phenomena. For the listener, or the interpreter, all of this, together with the simultaneous contextual cues, forms an indivisible communicative event, which in turn is

the input for his percept and reactions. According to the model, the percept of the external world, the intake, is not decoded as such; it is processed in reference to the communicative goals of the person. This interpretation, in turn, may result in a motive for a communicative move and the activation of the "message parlour". The goal and the event in the external world as a trigger to a communication response are also found in the motor skill model of Michael Argyle (1969).

FIGURE 1
A MODEL OF THE PROGRESSION OF COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS

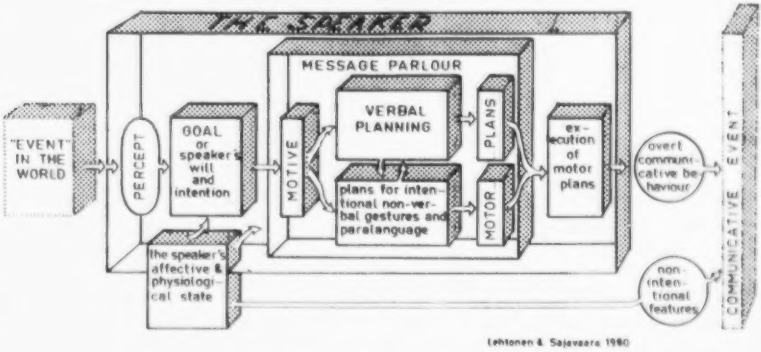

Figure 1. A model of the progression of communicative events.

Michael Argyle (1979) puts forth an interesting question: why is non-verbal communication used despite the fact that we have language? He lists a number of reasons: (1) Non-verbal communication is used to express attitudes like superiority/inferiority, dominance or submissiveness, warmth and coldness, attraction or dislike. For expressing interpersonal attitudes the non-verbal way is more dynamic than the equivalent verbal message among other things, because it allows the conveyance of information without directing attention to it, eg. "I am socially superior to you" or "I dislike you a little". (2) The non-verbal channel can be used to express emotions like depression, anger, anxiety, joy, surprise, fear, disgust or contempt. Each emotion signalled can be true or pretended. (3) Non-verbal communication is used for sending feedback signals or other signals when the verbal channel is occupied. (4) Non-verbal communication forms parts of several rituals in

in social situations like greetings, farewells, and so on. (5) Non-verbal behaviour is used to regulate the communicative flow between the interactants. The turn-taking mechanism as a whole consists of both verbal and non-verbal behaviours. (6) Non-verbal behaviours are also used for self-presentation. By means of non-verbal communication the speaker can give information about himself to the listener. (7) Last but not least, non-verbal communication is used to complete and elaborate the verbal utterance. Knapp (1978) lists the following possibilities: (a) non-verbal behaviour can substitute for verbal messages, (b) it can modify, or elaborate on, verbal messages, (c) it may accent or emphasize parts of the verbal message much as written words can be emphasized by means of underlining or italicizing.

The factor which makes the complete analysis and classification of non-verbal phenomena difficult, if not impossible, in practice is their multifunctionality: for the speaker, non-verbal behaviours are not only signals to be used instead of verbal messages. Non-verbal behaviours also serve for him as means to signal social roles and interpersonal attitudes. A speech situation is not merely an event in which a linguistic text was produced but also an extract of human interaction which actualizes both the individual speaker's goals and motives, communicator style, interpersonal attitudes, diverse personal and social stereotypes, and the social perception of the interactants (cf. Burgoon and Saine 1978: 144ff.).

In addition to the strictly communicative functions listed above, the non-verbal variables may also serve in other functions in interaction and message processing. Woodall and Folger (1981) suggest, for instance, that non-verbal contextual features may serve in memory as cues for the retrieval mechanism for co-occurring language episodes. According to their theory, non-verbal cues should be included in the contextual encoding conditions which can provide access to the co-occurring linguistic information. The memory retrieval function of non-verbal features seems to be of importance, however, only in such disambiguation conditions where the non-verbal cues are not synchronous with the patterns of speech (cf. Woodall & Folger 1981: 53).

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4. Message planning and impromptu speech

Textbooks of speech communication are unanimous in their definitions of impromptu speech (cf. e.g. Brooks 1978 and Ehninger *et al.* 1978). According to the textbooks, a speech may be *impromptu*, ie. delivered spontaneously without prior preparation, it may be *extemporaneous*, ie. planned in advance but presented freely, it may be *memorized*, ie. carefully prepared, committed to memory, and read by rote, or it may be a *manuscript delivery*, ie. a speech read from a written manuscript.

Speech in everyday speech situations, in casual conversations, in meetings and conferences, in classes and other group situations is normally either impromptu or extemporaneous. The situation is purely impromptu only if the speaker has not at all been able to predict the speech situation nor the subject of the speech or discussion. In the impromptu situation the time lag between the planning and the actual performance is minimal. The speaker has to have recourse, on all levels of planning, to automatized structures or stereotyped principles of message organization.

An impromptu talk takes place entirely on the spur of the moment. If the speaker is informed in advance of the speech situation, of the subject, and of the interactants or the audience, his performance is not any more impromptu but extemporaneous. Even if he does not make any notes for the speaking situation, he however subconsciously analyses the situation, makes strategies, collects data, activates vocabulary, and formulates his thoughts and opinions.

Accordingly, the form of speaking which is traditionally called extemporaneous is extemporaneous only at some rather low level of processing the linguistic form and at actual delivery but "pretemporaneous" or created prior to the time of delivery on the higher form and content levels (cf. Asante & Frye 1977: 177). A tentative classification of speaking types in terms of the immediacy of planning is given in Table 1.

When a person is speaking on the spur of the moment, the planning of the discourse takes place in the actual situation with a minimal or no time lag between the planning and the execution. Both the verbal and non-verbal choices are spontaneous, ie. not suggested by any prefabricated plans made for this particular speech situation. In a non-impromptu extemporaneous situation the speaker may have access to a prefabricated general outline of his talk, although the final syntactic and lexical choices remain spontaneous.

In memorization and in reading aloud, even the syntax and vocabulary are predetermined.

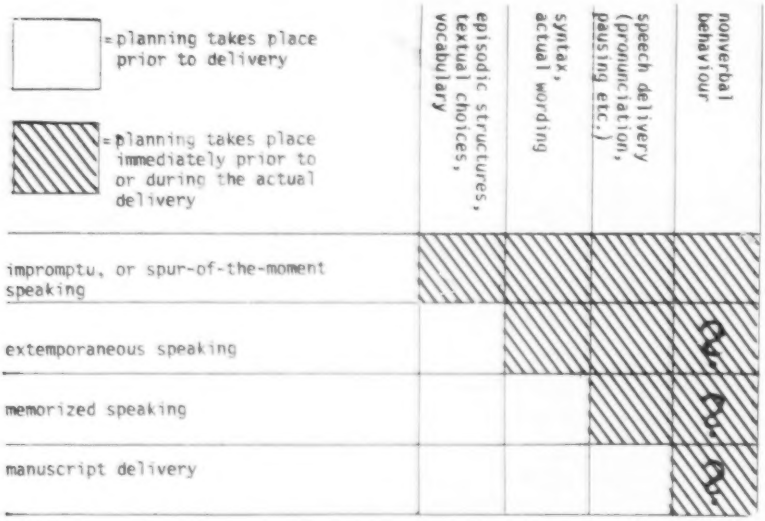
= planning takes place prior to delivery
= planning takes place immediately prior to or during the actual delivery
episodic structures, textual choices, vocabulary
syntax, actual wording
speech delivery (pronunciation, pausing etc.)
nonverbal behaviour
impromptu, or spur-of-the-moment speaking
extemporaneous speaking
memorized speaking
manuscript delivery

Table 1.

Preplanning vs. spontaneity of the non-verbal parameters is a more complicated issue. Some of the non-verbal features can be planned ahead unconsciously when selecting the register of speaking (formal or informal), the degree of intimacy, politeness or hostility and other attitudes to be expressed in the actual speech situation. It is, however, more plausible to assume that the actual choice of the tone of voice, patterns of gaze, gesticulation and individual postures all are executed on the spur of the moment both in impromptu and extemporaneous speaking but also when making a speech by rote and when reading aloud a written manuscript.

5. The shared knowledge and the non-verbal channel

Just as the concepts 'non-verbal' and 'communication', also 'impromptu speech' seems a little fuzzy. The term impromptu itself refers to the unexpectedness and spontaneity of the speech situation. However, the impromptuness of the situation for the speaker depends on several external and internal factors: what is known about the interactants, what is the degree of formality/intimacy of the situation and what are the speaker's communicative goals and motives in that very situation?

One extremity of impromptu speech with respect to context, address, intention, and discourse history is a laboratory situation in which the speech is a context-independent, non-addressed monologue with a zero-history or a discussion between persons who have never seen each other and have never entered a discussion together about anything. The other extreme is a real-world situation in which a piece of communication is addressed and intentional, both the verbal and the non-verbal channels are put to use, and the content of the discourse includes both cognitive and affective components. A real-world situation means a move of interaction in a given environmental setting. It is addressed to a person who shares a given amount of shared interest and knowledge with the addresser. In most real-world situations there also exists a history of earlier talks, contacts, and other experiences between the interactants. From the perspective of the researcher, the first, ie. the zero-history, situation is easier to handle. It is therefore the way in which the analytical studies of impromptu speech could proceed: in laboratory situations the number of intervening factors is reduced to the minimum. The task of abstracting the linguistic rules relevant for casual conversation as well as other stereotyped internal generalizations which cause and explain certain regularities and expectancy in impromptu conversation is much more difficult in normal live discussions. On this level, the 'non-verbal' social, cultural, and personality cues, but also things like personality characteristics, the person's cognitive style and his experiences, become more decisive.

Although it is impossible to calculate exact percentages of the relative importance of the non-verbal channel as compared to the linguistic messages, some suggestive hypotheses of the role of the verbal and non-verbal channels in various communicative situations can be outlined. It seems reasonable to hypothesize, for instance, that the relative communicative load of the

non-verbal elements in discourse as compared to that of the verbally-coded propositional content is related to the cognitive style of the speaker and to the type of discourse.

Communication styles can be divided, according the terminology adopted by Basil Bernstein, into particularistic and universalistic. In particularistic communications, the meanings are tied closely to the context; typically they deal with some concrete events or objects and work efficiently only if the participants attend to the same context, make the same assumptions of the external world, and also share a common data base. The linguistic form of a particularistic communication is elliptic and exophoric as consequence of the fact that the communicator refers to the concepts and matters by means of non-verbal signs. These elements substitute for parts of the verbal message and thus cause the ellipticity of the text. The more universalistic the communication style is, or the more abstract, general, and cognitively demanding the message to be conveyed is, the less the speaker can resort to elliptic structures, external reference, and non-verbal communication. Depending on the personal style of the speaker, non-verbal means can still be present but these are no longer important for the understanding of the message. Non-verbal cues may still reveal information to the listener about the emotional states and attitudes of the speaker but this information is not crucial for the interpretation of the linguistically well-formed and non--ambiguous verbal message. The only function of non-verbal communication which preserves its relative importance is the modification and elaboration of the linguistic signal. As a summary, the importance of the non-verbal channel depends on the function of the discourse, which normally also determines the communication style as more particularistic or more universalistic: informative discourse involves a higher dependence of information on the linguistic code, while emphasis on the social and expressive function also means greater dependence on the non-verbal channel.

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